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PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE SUCCESS OF DIVERSE SCHOOLS

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Principal's Role in the Success of Diverse Schools

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Abstract – Indian population is typically complex and diverse for its religious, cultural and socioeconomic diversities. The same is visible in schools in the post-independence era. Schools are bound to cater this diversity with the spirit of secularism and unity. The role of a Principal comes out to foster this diversity and inclusiveness in which an every individual child's education is successfully administered; basically six strategies are to be adopted by a Principal of a school with diversity. The present paper defines how these strategies could successfully improve inclusiveness. The researcher with his experience as a principal in a private school put all these strategies in practice and finds them effective. The same have been supported by many researches.

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INTRODUCTION

Indian population is typical diverse in religion, caste, colour, language, culture, sex and socio economic status. Religiously India is a complex combination of all religions of the world-among major religions there are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis etc. The diversity of faiths is even more complex as there are different small groups in thousands of numbers which have made Indian population more complex than religiously known. There groups diversify the Indian population with in religion with more complexity. There are groups of castes even more than recognized by Indian Constitution. The 'Verna' system has been turned into more complex caste system away from 'Swarnas and Avarnas'. The whole Indian community has very cleverly been divided by social and political leaders into defined non defined castes of all religions and faiths. The division of population in languages, away from constitutionally listed 18 languages, is complex in diverse dialect, slang and recognized literary linguistic structure. Culturally, Indian population is so diverse that sometimes it puzzles even the historians and social agents to name them typically. The two genders available in population are further strengthened by recent judicial decisions. The more complex view of Indian society is on the basis of socio-economic status in which only 3% population is the most affluent and rich 27% population falls in upper middle class, the 20% population falls in middle class and whereas the 50% population faces economic paucity for their both ends meet and puts serious questions nationally and internationally for its leaders. Under all these socio-economic diversities it has been our aim 'Education for all' starting from our

Constitutional Declaration of Article 45A, Part – IV under 'Directive Principles of State Policy' which provides educational right to every child of 6 to 14 age group of India. This Constitutional Resolve has further been strengthened by Right to Education enacted by Indian Parliament, which provides not only the right to education but also the right to equity, and equality quality education to every group of Indian population.

Historically, Indian education had been catering different cultural and ethnic groups under the system of Gurukulas and Madras's till medieval age typically. Under colonial period since 1835 when macaulay minutes presented imperialistic system of Indian education, which aimed at serving Indian population educationally not for the developmental purpose of Indian population but for creating a special group of educated class which could serve British Govt. effectively and create a typical class which had been Indian in colour but the English in its typical docile behavior. After this 'Macaulay's, Minutes' declaration a few public schools emerged here and there with composite diverse population. Though the number of such schools was not very large yet this legacy is being sustained after India's Independence and the present position of schooling is certainly diverse and complex in all its forms.

India is a secular democratic country in which all ethnic and socio economic groups are to be educationally catered with diversity, equity and social justice. There are schools who cater to the needs of upper stratum of Indian society though their numbers are very small. Then comes private schools with

charge alarmingly high fees which are rushed with children upper middle class and middle class strata of Indian population. There is another class of private schools and government schools. These government schools cater only the lower stratum of our India population. This population, even after incremental budgeting goes on decreasing with the changing socio-economic scenario and the solution of their poor critical functioning lies in their privatization. One typical similarity in all these schools is that they all have to foster diverse Indian population with inclusive approaches. All these schools have to follow particular constitutional guidelines of catering to the needs of the diverse Indian population.

Barring a few minority educational institutions which are negatively working for special ethnic groups and which are supported by dirty impeachment political motives, the rest of the educational institutions are invariably crowded by the children of all religions, castes, gender, culture and socioeconomic backgrounds. To create a new real secular attitudinal state of inclusive schools for these diverse students, the role of a principal is always valued as important and crucial. Some important administrative tasks and strategies are highlighted in this paper in which a Principal can create inclusive development of diverse students effectively. These strategies may be defined as:-

- Fostering new meaning about diversity;
- Promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programmes though culturally responsive inclusive teaching etc.;
- Building positive inclusive connections between schools and communities;
- Promoting inclusive practices with in schools;
- Promoting inclusive teaching and learning;
- Inculcating behavioural patterns in teachers, staff and students suitable for inclusive school culture.

An administrator or a principal, according to his role in the institution must think, plan and implement these strategies meticulously.

A brief serendipitous perusal of the history of Indian education, defined earlier is enough to suggest that diversity has been a continual challenge for school leaders in India like USA (Kaestle, 1973). The Educational administrator have essentially tended to be supportive of fostering new meaning about diversity which is an essential element of our secular democratic values. Hence they must not be considered as something troublesome. The common forms of schoolings would help create a unified secular society which best serve our Indian values (Kowalaski, 1995). A school leader or a Principal has to ponder

over both the rhetoric and the reality of how they could address questions of diversity in her schools (Burroughs, 1977).

It is certainly an accepted fact that a principal not only can foster a new meaning about essential status of Indian population but also can promote inclusive practices with in schools by inculcating values and presenting them before the teachers, students and community in practice.

Much of the literature on school reform both emanates from and is directed towards professional and technical processes internal to schools, particularly around the central activities of teaching and learning. New (or renewed) instructional methods, such as project-based learning or constructivist learning, new organizational configurations, such as smaller schools, small class sizes, or block scheduling, new forms of assessment and accountability, such as portfolios and high-stakes gateway testing, and new norms of teacher practice that emphasize collaboraton and professional growth are examples of reform initiatives that address fundamental structures and processes within schools. With most of these reforms, efforts have been made to explore their potential utility in improving educational experience and outcomes or diverse groups of students.

However, numerous analyses of educational change have demonstrated that school reform will not take hold unless broad constituencies, including students, parents, and the general public as well as educational professionals themselves, both understand and invest in the changes (e.g., Metz, 1990b; Tyack & Cuban 1995). This conclusion derives in large part from sociological theories of schools as institutionalized organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1978, 1977; Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1983; Scott, 1995) and from theories about organizational sense making (weick, 1995) Both perspectives are based on a fundamental understanding of organizations as cognitive accomplishments and social constructions, in which meaning-making is a primary dynamic. As institutionalized organizations, schools embody a complex array of understandings, beliefs, and values that find legitimacy through their acceptance by the broader public and that are encoded in school structures, cultures, and routine practices. Schools are, in effect, constructed around the meanings that people hold about them. Real organizational change occurs not simply when technical changes in structure and process are undertaken, but when persons inside and outside of the school construct new understanding about what the secular values means.

In this regard, the role of the school principal is crucial. Although meanings are negotiated socially, that is, through a shared process (Miron, 1997), leaders typically have additional power in defining situations and their meaning (Angus, 1996; Greenfield, 1984; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). In schools, administrators are often in a better position than others to influence

what things mean (Rallis, 1990). Anderson (1990) describes three strategies by which principals influence meaning-making: through the day-to-day management of meaning among organizational stakeholders, through the mediation of conflict when open contention arises, and through the cognitive task of resolving contradictions within their own ideological perspectives. Administrators can employ a variety of rhetorical and dialogic strategies in communicating new understandings. Opportunities for promoting new meaning include official ceremonies, public relations events, meetings, and the like (Strike, 1993). Moreover, since meanings are encapsulated in organizational structures and routines, administrators can help inculcating secular values by changing the routine ways in which things are done and how the school organization is designed (Meyer, 1984).

These ideas can be applied to the case of reforming schools to respond to the needs of diverse students. The development of inclusive structures and practices must be accompanied by new understanding and values or they will not result in a lasting change. Principals are key agents in framing those new meanings.

A key strategy available to school principals for accomplishing this is the promotion of secular democratic discourse within the school community. Numerous scholars, writing from normative and critical traditions as well as from empirical perspectives, have explored how democratic discourse processes in schools can engender educational practices that serve the needs of diverse students (e.g., Corson, 1995c, 1995a; Ellsworth, 1989; Perry & Fraser, 1993; Rusch, 1998). Many of these draw on theories of communication developed by philosophers such as Habermas (1990) and Bakhtin (1981/1935). Sirotnik and Oakes (1986), for example, borrow Habermas' notion of an ideal speech situation to suggest that secular democratic discourse in schools must be characterized by free exploration, honest exchange, and non-manipulative discussion in light of critical questions.

A second task facing school administrators is to help create specific conditions and practices within schools that address the needs of diverse students. This task centers around two dimensions: promoting forms of teaching and learning that enable diverse students to succeed and moulding school cultures that embrace and support diversity. Administrators can act in direct ways to impress upon the school culture but their role with regard to inclusive instructional practice is more effective. Current work on administrators' instructional leadership (e.g., Leithwood, 1994; Murphy & Louis, 1994) casts it as supportive, facilitative, or catalytic, with administrators helping to establish the goals, obtain the resource, stimulate the understandings, change the structures, and promote the practices that improve learning experiences and outcomes for

students. Research on instructional leadership, however, rarely explores issues of students diversity and learning explicitly. Thus, knowledge about how leaders promote inclusive instructional practices in schools must often be inferred from broader work.

Though the syllabus is already structured on this pattern yet practices must be observed judiciously. Promoting inclusive teaching and learning is supported by Rosenholtz when he concluded that, in schools serving diverse students population, the most important contribution administrators could make would be to help increase teachers' certainty about their goals for students achievement and their ability to meet these goals and to know when they did so. Effective principals' actions included hiring and socializing new teachers carefully, buffering teachers from intrusions on teaching, providing substantive feedback to teachers on their teaching, and helping to create norms of continuous improvement in the school without any prejudices and biases.

Research on culturally relevant or culturally responsive teaching, in contrast to these lines of inquiry, begins more explicitly with the premise that culturally diverse students pose opportunities instead of problems for teachers (e.g., Ball, 1996; Ball, Williams, & Cooks, 1997; Foster, 1995, 1993; Hopkins, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1992). In these models, teachers promote learning among culturally diverse students when they honour different ways of knowing and source of knowledge, allow students to speak and write in their own experiences and use culturally compatible communication styles themselves, express cultural solidarity with their students, share power with students, focus on caring for the whole child, and maintain high expectations for all. The role of administrators typically is not explored in the literature on culturally responsive teaching, but by extension it may be inferred that administrators can promote these strategies for teaching by demonstrating them themselves in their work with parents, teachers, and students.

Efforts of the Principal should be towards a comprehensive philosophical reform of the school environment essentially focused on the principles of equity, success, and social justice for all students. Equity is the result of changing the school environment, especially the curriculum and instruction component, through restructuring and reorganizing so that student from diverse racial, ethnic, and social classes experience educational equality and cultural empowerment. Success is demonstrated through parity representation of achievement of the school students across racial, ethnic, cultural and social classes. Social justice in schools is accomplished by the process of judicious pedagogy as its cornerstone and focuses on unabridged knowledge, reflection,

and social action as the foundation for social change. (Baptiste, 1999).

A principal can effectively build secular connection and inculcate inclusive values between school and communities by celebrating birthdays of great men from all communities and ethnic groups; important days of all faiths; inviting influential leaders to interact with school communities but in a very secular non-prejudiced manner; appoint teachers from all religious groups and allow the school community to honour their respective religious and cultural values and promote effective communication among all cultural and religious groups equally. Activities in morning assemblies must reflect composite comprehensive inclusive cultural values and also construction, promotion of inclusive school cultures and instructional practices and work to position schools with in community organization and service related network. (Dillard, 1995).

The role of an administrator or a principal can be summarised when he weds to a relentless commitment to equity, voice and social justice, by working in the task of sense making, promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationship outside of the school. Thus may indeed foster a new form of practice suitable for the success of secular inclusive culture in his school.

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